

combed grey hair, Larry Apsey's face is alive with the joy of being able to fill his retirement years with important and satisfying work. Inmates in the nonviolence program have heard him explain that nonviolence is not merely the absence of violence: it has a powerful, positive quality that enables it to transform things. This power stems from the spirit, "what we Friends call the inner light," Apsey says. Others may call it psychic perception or gut reaction. But, whatever it is, "it just fits yourself and your opponent and the situation. If you catch that, you will take the action which has the power to transform."

Apsey described the sense of trust and the feeling of community that grows up in the groups of inmates taking nonviolence training, feelings that are almost unknown in prison. The Quakers have developed games and exercises that build these feelings. With prisoners, the exercise that works best is one where they all sit on the floor in a closely-packed group and raise their hands above their heads. One of them takes a running leap and dives into the sea of hands. The others catch him, hold him up high, pass him carefully to the back of the group and set him down. This exercise gives men who are continually alienated from each other by the prison system a new feeling of trust in fellow inmates. After it, things seem to go especially well in role-playing conflict situations that could arise inside or outside of prison. The situations are chosen by the men, who change roles and work on each situation—sometimes even videotaping and playing it back—until it seems to work. Some of the prison situations they have worked on include: the testing of a new inmate, homosexual invitation, name-calling, real estate rights in the prison yard, guards refusing to listen, and racial hostility.

No one claims that the particular situation would necessarily work out in life the way it is solved in training, however. Working on specific confrontations is simply a way to get people to begin to respond nonviolently to life situations. Then when something really happens, Apsey explained, "a power comes to you at the time." He gave an example—not the best one in the world, but a true one—of how nonviolence training had helped one inmate avoid trouble. He had awakened one night to find another inmate going through his pockets. He jumped out of bed, then paused, remembering that he had just finished nonviolence training. By then, he saw that the intruder was an old man. "What are you doing?" he asked. He was looking for a cigarette, the man replied, dying for a smoke. At a later date, the same incident occurred with another inmate who jumped the old man and beat him badly, thus getting himself into serious trouble, as well.

In his presentation of framed certificates to the new inmate trainers, Apsey introduced each man with a brief, personal description, describing a small man as "quiet, he doesn't like the limelight," and a giant of a man as "a man of great power, which ran away from him in the past." Following the awarding of certificates, Cecil Seabury, an aide to State Corrections Commissioner Benjamin Ward, offered the commissioner's cautious congratulations to the men in a single sentence.

Last to speak was Bob Burley, one of the seven graduates. Burley bears the designation "inmate chaplain" and wears a handsome wooden cross around his neck. He recited the "Let freedom ring" part of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" in a voice so like King's that it brought unexpected tears to some eyes. He ended with the words: "Those of us who have graduated here have a dream that if

we are able to stop any violence from any person, our work will not have been in vain."

The nonviolence programs at Green Haven and elsewhere give every evidence of having turned some people around in a more fundamental way than dealing with surface confrontations. Some inmates have really taken to heart the basic message of the training and believe, in Apsey's words, that a power "wells up inside you once you accept yourself as a worthy person capable of confronting evil." Most of the men enter the programs highly skeptical that nonviolence can work. They tell of having grown up with violence since childhood. "Every time I avoided violence, I got my face knocked in," said one. "Peace is cool, but the world doesn't function on it," said another. But some of the most skeptical come out of the program with a self-confidence they have never known, even losing their fear of whether they can make it on the outside. In the meantime, they are holding to the belief that even in the most dehumanizing of environments it is possible to call forth from an adversary the desire to be fair and to do the right thing that is buried somewhere deep within.

Joseph Aitken, an inmate at Wallkill, put his feelings into a letter to Larry Apsey:

*The flower breathes in our impurities and changes them into a substance that sustains life. With learning and showing people the concept of nonviolence, I find that we are that flower taking in the evils of the world and transforming them into a love for mankind, compassion for the human race, and most important of all, respect and dignity for ourselves. I never realized how much there was to nonviolence until now. It's much more than controlling yourself in a violent situation. It's molding and shaping yourself into accepting the reality of life and being strong enough in your belief of yourself. I find myself at a turning point in my life.*

Because it has turned some men's lives around, interest in the program is growing in the prisons. At Green Haven, one hundred men were waiting for nonviolent training at the end of the year. Programs have now been held, some of them ongoing, at six institutions in the state, including Auburn and Wallkill. A number of other institutions have requested nonviolence training, including the Women's Prison at Bedford Hills and some homes for hardcore delinquents.

Prisoners have to live with feelings of helplessness, frustration and anger. Their lives are in the hands of keepers who have their own problems and are often indifferent, if not hostile or brutal. Those who come through the experience best have learned, one way or another, that freedom and strength lie within—whether you're in prison or on the outside. If the nonviolence program can spur the process of inner growth in some inmates, why, some have asked, aren't the guards taking it too? (In fact, several guards assigned to watch the programs have participated, to the degree that they were able.) There is little question that if large numbers of corrections people and inmates were involved in nonviolence programs, prisons would be more bearable, not only for those serving time, but for those who work there, too.

That prisons should not even exist in their present form is another story. But while they do, the people inside need a philosophy that works, something to believe in that will get them through the long days and nights. For some, nonviolence training has provided it.